

# ECHOES

## The Enlarged General Council 14 - 24 February 2018



14/02/2018 – The First Day - Ash Wednesday. Two beginnings on the same day. An invitation to the Institute's Leaders to be open to the movements of the Spirit and to allow something new to emerge.

### *The aim of the Enlarged General Council of February 2018:*

**To draw up an idea, a vision, an awareness of our Institute as a whole at the present stage of its evolution in order to discern and decide together how to move forward on the path of transformation that we desire.**



Twenty-six representatives from across the Institute, including the members of the General Leadership Team and the Vicariate Council, met in the Generalate in Rome from 14 to 24 February, 2018.

This was the first EGC after the 2014 Chapter, when all the Unit Leaders from different countries came together with the General Leadership Team to help one other through listening, discernment and decision-making. It was a visible expression of the Institute.

During the opening prayer, the following refrain was sung repeatedly:

“In your Spirit, gather us,  
In your Spirit, open our hearts  
In your Spirit, O God, guide and direct  
our path”.

At one point each participant was given a card on which was written the name of a country not her own. All were invited to try to connect with the country whose name they had received by means of pictures on the card. They then placed the cards on a map of the world in the prayer centre-piece as a symbol of their connectedness with the planet.

In her opening address to the EGC, the Superior General Ana Maria AL-CALDE noted that *“As a group and as individuals, we are co-responsible for **the present and the future of the Institute and its mission**”*. She reminded the participants that the aim of this EGC is to become aware of the Institute as a whole, at the present moment of its historical evolution, so as to be able to discern and decide together what commitments God is calling us to in order to promote life and mission.

Mr. Matthieu DAUM who facilitated the session, is a French and father of a family; he is a consultant and a facilitator accompanying the changes in the organizations. He began his professional life in the UK in psychiatry, before launching his organisational consultancy career in 2000. His expertise focuses on leadership skills and team effectiveness in situations of high external and internal pressure.

She continued, “As we re-read the 200 years of our Holy Family Life, we become aware of our historical evolution. We realize that, today some Units and the Vicariate of the Institute are getting smaller, while others are growing slightly. We have the possibility of spreading the Holy Family Charism to countries where we are not yet present. There are new inspirations and responses for the way we live our mission. Opening ourselves to this action of the Spirit changes our way of looking at things and gives us the hope and confidence that perhaps we are not approaching the end but rather a new beginning in our process of historical evolution.”

She concluded her talk with a quotation from Pope Francis in an address to Religious: *“The temptation of survival turns what the Lord presents as an opportunity for mission into something dangerous, threatening, potentially disastrous”* and recalled the question that we have heard so many times since the last Chapter,

**“IF WE DO NOT DARE NOW  
THEN WHEN?”**



Matthieu DAUM then presented the programme for the ten days. He stressed the importance of the word “commitment” saying that if we realise that our “Yes” to God propels us forward and leads us into action through communal discernment, eventually we will have a better understanding of the meaning of our commitments.

He then invited all

- To see their own individual reality,
- To get in touch with the reality of the whole body (the Institute)
- To realise what is missing in the reality,
- To recognize those things that are generally more difficult to see.

He also introduced the **Seven Principles of Generative Listening** in order to enable the participants to listen to one another attentively.

- 1. Slowing down, and noticing more of what is present**
- 2. Listening with all my senses**
- 3. Listening to the words/images chosen: why those specifically, and not others?**
- 4. Listening to the emotions conveyed by the person who is talking**
- 5. Suspending judgement: not pre-empting, classifying, or dismissing what the person is saying. It is her reality as she is experiencing it and making sense of it.**
- 6. Noticing what I do not understand or what triggers questions for me, rather than what I do not like about what I hear**
- 7. What do I feel as I listen to what is being said, and why?**

Sharing in small groups followed, and continued in the afternoon, when the participants shared their responses to the questions contained in two letters sent to the Leadership Teams in preparation for the EGC. You are probably familiar with these questions, designed to be discussed with the members of your Leadership Teams informally during meetings,

and other gatherings in your Units. They touched on the steps taken to carry out the decisions or recommendations of the 2014 Chapter, their impact, factors that have slowed down or blocked progress, how these have been dealt with, as well as the challenges and opportunities, and the sources of hope, energy and possibility.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> day:

The opening prayer of the day helped the participants to slow down and enter into deep silence in order to recognize the divine presence.

Matthieu DAUM assigned two tasks for the day:

- ◆ To do some symbolic work to present one's own reality in a creative way, using the material- boxes full of cardboards, colored sheets, crayons , cups and containers provided:

Participants were given half an hour to create a sculpture/collage to present their reality. They engaged in this activity with honesty and interest. The outcome: each Unit was illustrated in diverse shapes, color, writing and images.



- ◆ To present Reports from the Units based on the questions sent to the leaders by the GLT in preparation for the EGC:

This work was done in small language groups. There were 6 groups - 3 English, 2 French and 1 Spanish according to Units which were clustered together. The representatives of each language group shared the fruits of their work.

The group responses, as well as the reports from the General Leadership Team and the Vicariate Council were clear, honest and realistic, giving an overall picture of the “state of the Institute”. This was an important part of the process: a process in which the whole body will be engaged over the coming months, so that the answers, the discoveries, and the responsibility can be shared with, and experienced by all. For this reason, this “Echoes” will not report the details of the process. Here we simply share the global “Quantitative” elements.



**The General Leadership Team - Quantitative elements:**

In 2007 there were 1,979 Sisters in the Institute; today, ten years later, we are 1,483 (496 fewer). This decrease is mainly due to the number of deaths, between 45-50 per year. The number of people who enter the Institute has reduced by 45% in the last ten years. In 2007 there were 147 sisters in Temporary Vows and in 2017 there are 78.



**The forecast** is that we will continue to decrease notably in Europe and America, and more gradually in Asia. The increase of vocations in some countries of Africa and Asia, will not compensate for the overall decrease.



In 2027 we will be around 990 sisters, of whom:  
 39% will be 80 or more years of age  
 24% between 60 - 80 years  
 34% between 40 - 60 years  
 03% less than 40 years



This approximate data can help us reflect and prepare for the future with realism at all levels.



### 3<sup>rd</sup> day:

Through some quiet moments, the participants got in touch with the reality of the whole Institute. Then, in gratitude for God's wonderful works they sang the song "in the name of all, we are thankful to God".

#### The task for the day:

Setting the day's work, Matthieu pointed out that the fact that our Holy Family charism and spirituality have great life-giving capacities that can give us a sense of security, a feeling that things are going well. At the same time, we know that some things are not going so well. They were asked to name the systems, structures etc. of the Institute

that are not working well and cannot, therefore, be continued as they are at present. Some of the areas that emerged as needing attention were:

- Sustainable financial management
- Structures at all levels
- Communities for mission
- Inadequate provision for diminishment and the aging of members

The next step was to consider what emerged from the morning's sharing and to see what it is that blocks us from incarnating our Charism in today's world.



### 4<sup>th</sup> day

The Prayer urged the participants to be centered on "our presence, our mission and our reason for being in today's world which invites us to read the signs of the time with a discerning spirit."

Matthieu took time during the morning to remind the group of some tools

for analysis and interaction which were later often referred to during the meeting. Here we share just one: four steps in **Generative Speaking** – or it could be termed, " a generative way of responding" to what has been heard...

<p>What I heard, what is clearer, what I agree with, what I hold on to in what you have said</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1</p>	<p>What I don't understand/still needs clarifying in what I have heard</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>
<p>New ideas that came to me whilst listening to you, but that I have not heard you</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>	<p>The key points/issues that I do not see being taken into account in what I have heard</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4</p>

### 5<sup>th</sup> day:

The first Sunday of Lent – it was a reminder of Jesus' Paschal journey and an invitation to enter into that same paschal path – to die to whatever no longer gives us life in living our mission.

The following phrase was sung repeatedly as a sign of self-surrender:

**Lead me guide me in your way ///  
Your holy way, O my God**

### 6<sup>th</sup> day:

It was a significant day, the theme of which was **“Letting Go and Letting Die”**, followed by **“What is God calling us to?”**. The facilitator invited the participants to think over the process lived so far and to say where they were now. Through much reflection and sharing, they entered courageously into the work of the day.

A short prayer was based on a reading taken from the Book of Jeremiah,

The invitation for the day was to crystalize, clarify the essential points that arose from the previous day around the following themes:

- COMMUNITY LIFE:
- STRUCTURES:
- APOSTOLIC RESPONSES:
- LEADERSHIP:
- THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM:

Five groups (the Contemplative Sisters met on their own), were formed to discuss each theme.

where God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to go to a potter's house. This symbolism was used to deepen the message that we need to surrender and let go so that something new can emerge.

**“Lord I surrender to you, help me – I want to be a new vessel”**

The participants reconnected with the five major themes on which they had worked and reflected. Matthieu pointed out that though there was nothing new in what had been named, there was newness in the fact that the group had come to realise how they had allowed energy-draining situations to continue. The invitation now was to start from within and relate differently to these. He reminded the participants that

### **7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> day:**

With the commitments made on the previous day, the participants began a process of how to go about them. It was discovering and planning a way of acting upon these commitments in their own contexts: to map out how, in that particular part of the Body, things are to be put in place in order to live the leadership role differently and get others engaged in taking up their roles differently.

They went in six groups with the GLT and Vicariate groups working on their own, on the What/Who/Where/how etc....

Speaking about how and who will help in this journey, Matthieu emphasized two aspects – accountability and support. He underlined that each member is responsible and accountable. He said that it is important to ensure how these

the new would come from the way they now see things and especially how they would use the tools given.

In the afternoon in a personal contemplative atmosphere for two hours, they continued on the path towards making commitments which would have implications for themselves and for their Units.

elements are exercised, and also invited the participants to explore with humility the support they need. During these days, a lot of time was spent in the Assembly engaged in conversation on different practical aspects around facilitating the same experience back in their own contexts, from now till next EGC. How this EGC can be accountable to itself, and what to do about some structures within the Body that do not function well, were among the main points reflected on and discussed.

Agnès ONGWISA - (Cameroun-Tchad), Angelina SOHAN - (Pakistan), and Georgine MUFOGOTO - (Congo) shared the situation of their respective countries, which are particularly difficult and dangerous at this time.

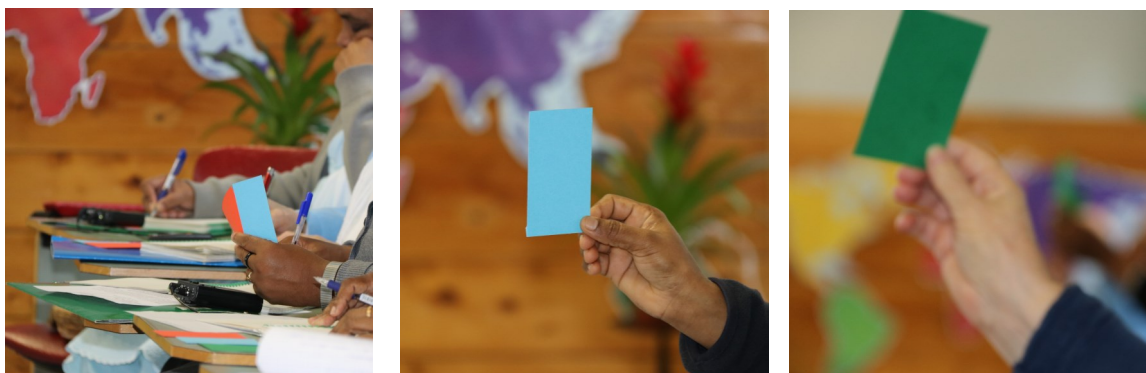
### **10<sup>th</sup> day Morning:**

Time to decide together on 5 proposals brought by the General Leadership Team; these had been spoken of in the assembly; approval of the body was now sought. The participants were given cards in 3 different colours; Green, blue and Red that respectively meant; I agree, I agree but need clarification and I do not agree. During the process, no red card, and only one or two blues were shown.



The five proposals were in relation to the following:

- ⇒ The process of naming the Unit leader
- ⇒ Appointing of the Unit Leadership Teams
- ⇒ Appointing of the bursar
- ⇒ Functioning of Networks
- ⇒ Carrying the lived experience of the EGC back to all in the Units



A letter drafted by three volunteers and signed by all the participants was read to the Assembly and unanimously approved. Here we share with you the text:

*“At the end of the ten days of the E.G.C. at the Generalate, we want to share with you the essential points of our experience together as an Institute of Two Vocations.*

*We welcomed the life of the Institute through what is being experienced in the various Units.*

*We went through a process to look at the life that is circulating through our body as an institute. We did this on the basis of our real situations both qualitative (mission, community life, relationships) and quantitative (statistics, finance, structures).*

*We were able to name what is making our Institute unhealthy and weakening it. Rather than age and our decreasing numbers, it is the weakness of our authentic commitment for mission that is the cause of our lack of vitality.*

*We became aware of each one’s responsibility, members and leaders, and of what cannot continue; we committed ourselves personally and together as a body to get rid of whatever is blocking life.*

*The context is evolving. The mission is there and calls us forward. We have made choices which involve everyone and which touch the real situations of our life.*

*Now, each Unit is called to enter into the same process.*

*The road to Easter is long one. Let us take the risk of travelling it!*

**If we do not dare now,  
Then when?**



**Afternoon**, the participants were back in the Assembly hall for the last session. They were invited to share what was moving within them and what they would be taking with them, at the end of this ten-day experience.

They expressed sentiments of ;

**Gratitude** for the presence and movement of the Spirit in and among them, for the openness and collaborative spirit of the members, for the enrichment and strength received through the sharing and

**Hope** in the seriousness of all to commit not to continue what no longer gives life, in living mission.

Ana Maria then addressed all, bringing the EGC to a close:

*We are coming to the end of this EGC and we are getting ready to leave, to continue living the process that we have started during these days.*

*Now we are more aware of the importance of our role as "gardeners" to urgently treat the Holy Family "tree", so that it can recover the health it needs for the good of humanity and of the planet, who are crying out for help; and so that our raison d'être as consecrated Holy Family women can recover its full meaning.*

*We have become aware of the responsibility we have as leaders and we have committed ourselves personally and as a group to fully exercise our role in a different way. The transformation begins/ has already begun in me, in us.*

*As the poet says: " Do not expect that God will grind the wheat, or knead the dough, or bake your bread for you! The work has been entrusted to your hands; there will be no universal feast unless you organise it yourselves. The wine of joy will not be poured if you yourselves do not press the grapes. Don't wait for God to do everything!" ( Charles Singer )*

When we feel fear and are tempted to go back on the commitments we have made, when we dare to evaluate ourselves with sincerity rather than calling omission, conformism and comfort "sensible"... When we experience our vulnerability and our limits, let's not hesitate to look for the help and support that we need from one another, from other "allies" and from God, who is the source of Life, Love, Light ... and what God always wants is life in abundance for the "body" that we are, and for all his Creation.

In this historical moment we have to keep moving with our eyes and heart open, involved in the reality outside us and within, to transform them.

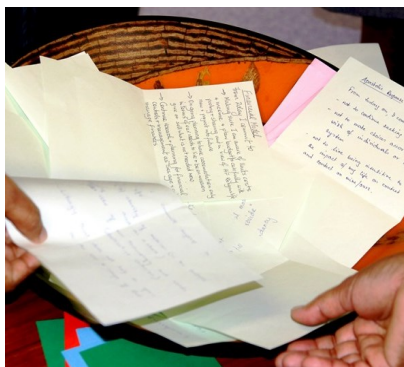
Thanks to each of you and to your teams for the suggestions given, which were at the origin of this

process. Thank you for your participation and commitment during these days. That With this spirit of collaboration, we can continue moving forward together towards a more vibrant future for the of the Holy Family "tree".

May the memory and example of those who have preceded us inspire and sustain us in the challenges that we have to face today.

That in the deep yearning for communion that we share with humanity and more concretely with the people around us, we discover God who comes to meet us and calls us to commit ourselves according to our Charism. We are sent on Mission.

**If we do not dare now,  
Then when?**



The opening song of the final ritual "Consciousness Waking", helped everyone to recall that the Time is NOW and they themselves were the space for the Holy to be born. It was a powerful moment when each member expressing in her own language, "I commit". At the end of the prayer, each received a candle and light was passed from one to the

other. When all candles were lit Ana Maria offered each participant a card as a souvenir of the experience of this EGC. The prayer ended with the song - 'Go light your world.' Expressions of gratitude, joy and laughter filled the hall as the session came to an end!



The participants of the EGC

